Latest release

Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia methodology

Reference period February 2025

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Introduction

The Participation, Job Search and Mobility (PJSM) survey was conducted throughout Australia in February 2025 as a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). Respondents to the LFS who fell within the scope of the supplementary survey were asked further questions.

It informs on the following broad labour market issues: job mobility; job search; participation and increasing participation; underemployment; potential workers and job attachment. This enables analysis of peoples experiences relating to job search, job change and increasing participation, all of which can be cross classified by other employment characteristics such as hours worked, industry, occupation and sector of job, as well as personal characteristics.

Additional information about survey design, scope, coverage and population benchmarks relevant to the monthly LFS, which also applies to supplementary surveys, can be found in Labour Force, Australia, Methodology. (/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/feb-2025)

Descriptions of the underlying concepts and structure of Australia's labour force statistics, and the sources and methods used in compiling the estimates, are presented in Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods. (/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/latest-release)

Scope and Coverage

The scope of the LFS is the civilian population aged 15 years and over, excluding:

- Members of the permanent defence forces
- Certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments
- Overseas residents in Australia
- Members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.

Students at boarding schools, patients in hospitals, residents of homes (e.g. retirement homes, homes for people with disabilities), and inmates of prisons are excluded from all supplementary surveys.

This supplementary survey was conducted in both urban and rural areas in all states and territories, but excluded people living in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In the LFS, coverage rules are applied, which aim to ensure that each person is associated with only one dwelling, and hence has only one chance of selection in the survey. See Labour Force, Australia, Methodology (/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/feb-2025) for more details.

Collection Method

Supplementary surveys are not conducted on the full LFS sample. Since August 1994, the sample for supplementary surveys has been restricted to no more than seven-eighths of the LFS sample. This survey is based on the new sample introduced into LFS in July 2018. The new sample design has adopted the use of the Address Register as the sampling frame for unit selection, and the sampling fractions for selection probabilities within each state have been updated to reflect the most recent population distribution based on results from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing. As with each regular sample design, the impacts on the data are expected to be minimal. For more information, see the Information Paper: Labour Force Survey Sample Design, Jul 2018 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6269.0) .

Information is obtained either by trained interviewers or through self-completion online. The interviews are generally conducted during the two weeks beginning on the Sunday between the 2nd and 9th of February. The information obtained relates to the week before the interview (i.e. the reference week). Occasionally, circumstances that present significant operational difficulties for survey collection can result in a change to the normal pattern for the start of interviewing.

PJSM questionnaire

Download XLSX
[162.46 KB]

Weighting and estimation

Population benchmarks

The Labour Force Survey estimates and estimates from the supplementary surveys such as Participation, Job Search and Mobility are calculated in such a way as to sum to the independent estimates of the civilian population aged 15 years and over (population benchmarks). These population benchmarks are updated quarterly based on Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data. See Labour Force, Australia, Methodology (/methodologies/labour-force-australia-methodology/feb-2025) for more information.

From August 2015, Labour Force Estimates have been compiled using population benchmarks based on the most recently available release of ERP data, continually revised on a quarterly basis.

To reduce the impact of seasonality on total employment, the estimates have been adjusted by factors based on trend LFS estimates. These factors were applied at the state and territory, sex, full-time and total employment levels, based on the trend LFS series as published in the February 2025 issue of Labour Force, Australia (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/feb-2025) . This adjustment accounts for February seasonality.

Comparability with LFS

Due to differences in the scope and sample size of this supplementary survey and that of the monthly LFS, the estimates procedure may lead to some small variations between labour force estimates from this survey and those from the LFS.

Survey output

Release strategy

Statistics from the Participation, Job Search and Mobility survey are published in 3 topic-based releases, see:

- Potential workers (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/potential-workers/latest-release)
- Job mobility (/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release)
- Underemployed workers (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/latest-release)

Survey Content

Participation, Job Search and Mobility collects data from people aged 15 years and older with the following conceptual groups:

- Available for work or more hours
- Away from work
- Barriers to participation
- Changes in current job over last 12 months
- Characteristics of current main job
- Characteristics of employment
- Characteristics of job 12 months ago
- Characteristics of last job
- Demographic
- Difficulties in finding work
- Education
- Families and children
- Job offers
- Looking for work or more hours
- Participation and Underemployment
- Retrenchment and lost jobs
- Wanting to work or more hours

For more details, refer to the Data item list

PJSM Data item list

Download XLSX
[672.54 KB]

Previous surveys

Prior to 2015, statistics were published in:

- Persons Not in the Labour force, Underemployed Workers and Job Search Experience, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/86A6C23052337F6ACA257DF40079A94B?OpenDocument) (cat. no. 6226.0.55.001) (for 2014)
- Labour Mobility, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6209.0) (cat. no. 6209.0)
- Persons Not in the Labour Force, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6220.0Main+Features1September%202013?OpenDocument) (cat. no. 6220.0)
- Job Search Experience, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6222.0) (cat. no. 6222.0)
- Underemployed workers, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/6265.0) (cat. no. 6265.0)
- Labour Force Experience (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6206.0&viewtitle=Labour%20Force%20Experience,%20Australia~Feb%202011~Latest~31/08/2011&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6206.0&issue=Feb%202011&num=&view=&) (6206.0), 1968-2011.
- Career Experience (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6254.0&viewtitle=Career%20Experience,%20Australia~Nov%202002~Latest~22/09/2003&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6254.0&issue=Nov%202002&num=&view=&) (6254.0), 1993-2002.
- Retrenchment and Redundancy (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6266.0&viewtitle=Retrenchment%20and%20Redundancy,%20Australia~Jul%202001~Latest~02/08/2002&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6266.0&issue=Jul%202001&num=&view=&) (6266.0), 1997-2001.
- Successful and Unsuccessful Job Search Experience (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6245.0&viewtitle=Successful%20and%20Unsuccessful%20Job%20Search%20Experience,%20Australia~Jul%202000~Latest~06/06/2001&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6245.0&issue=Jul%202000&num=&view=&) (6245.0), 1982-2000.
- Persons Who Had Re-entered The Labour Force (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6264.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Who%20Had%20Re-entered%20The%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~Jul%201995~Latest~01/02/1996&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6264.0&issue=Jul%201995&num=&view=&) (6264.0), 1985-1995.
- Persons Who Have Left The Labour Force (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6267.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Who%20Have%20Left%20The%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~Sep%201994~Latest~02/04/1995&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6267.0&issue=Sep%201994&num=&view=&) (6267.0), 1985-1994.
- Labour Turnover (https://archive.org/details/australian-statistics?and%5B%5D=subject%3A%22Labour+Turnover%22&sort=-date) (6210.0), 1949-1976.

Care should be taken when comparing the estimates from PJSM with previous supplementary surveys as Persons Not in the Labour Force (PNILF) and Underemployed Workers (UEW) were previously collected in September, Job Search Experience (JSE) in July, and Labour Mobility (LMOB) was collected in February. Collection of data from the combined PJSM survey was undertaken in February.

Persons Not in the Labour Force (PNILF)

PNILF was first conducted in May 1975 and again in May 1977. From 1979 to 1987 the survey was collected twice a year (March and September). From 1988 to 2013 it was conducted annually in September.

Underemployed Workers (UEW)

UEW was conducted in May 1985, 1988 and 1991. In 1994, the survey became an annual survey and until 2013 was collected each September.

Job Search Experience (JSE)

JSE was conducted annually in July from 2002 to 2013. Results of similar surveys on the job search experience of unemployed persons conducted in July 1984, July 1985, June 1986, July 1988, July 1990, June 1991, and annually from July 1992 to July 2001 were published in various issues of Job Search Experience of Unemployed Persons, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6222.0) (cat. no. 6222.0). Information on people who had started work for an employer for wages or salary during the 12 months up to the end of the reference week was collected in June 1986 and two-yearly from July 1990 to July 2000 and was published in Successful and Unsuccessful Job Search Experience, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6245.0) (cat. no. 6245.0).

Labour Mobility

Labour Mobility and similar surveys were conducted in November 1972, February 1975, February 1976, annually from February 1979 to February 1992 and biennially from February 1994 to February 2012 and most recently in February 2013.

Accuracy and quality

Reliability of estimates

As the estimates are based on information obtained from occupants of a sample of households, they are subject to sampling variability. That is, they may differ from those estimates that would have been produced if all households had been included in the survey or a different sample was selected. Two types of error are possible in an estimate based on a sample survey - sampling error and non-sampling error.

sampling error is the difference between the published estimate and the value that would have been produced if all dwellings had been included in the survey.

non-sampling errors are inaccuracies that occur because of imperfections in reporting by respondents and interviewers, and errors made in coding and processing data. These inaccuracies may occur in any enumeration, whether it be a full count or a sample. Every effort is made to reduce the non-sampling error to a minimum by careful design of questionnaires, intensive training and effective processing procedures.

Some of the estimates contained in the tables have a relative standard error (RSE) of 50 per cent or greater. These estimates are marked as unreliable for general use. Estimates with an RSE of between 25 and 50 per cent are also marked and should be used with caution.

More on reliability of estimates

Non-sampling error

Non-sampling error may occur in any collection, whether it is based on a sample or a full count such as a census. Sources of non-sampling error include non-response, errors in reporting by respondents or recording of answers by interviewers and errors in coding and processing data. Every effort is made to reduce non-sampling error by careful design and testing of questionnaires, training and supervision of interviewers, and extensive editing and quality control procedures at all stages of data processing.

Sampling error

Sampling error is the difference between the published estimates, derived from a sample of persons, and the value that would have been produced if the total population (as defined by the scope of the survey) had been included in the survey. One measure of the sampling error is given by the standard error (SE), which indicates the extent to which an estimate might have varied by chance because only a sample of persons was included. There are about two chances in three (67%) that a sample estimate will differ by less than one SE from the number that would have been obtained if all households had been surveyed, and about 19 chances in 20 (95%) that the difference will be less than two SEs.

Another measure of the likely difference is the relative standard error (RSE), which is obtained by expressing the SE as a percentage of the estimate.

$$RSE\% = (\frac{SE}{estimate}) \times 100$$

RSEs for estimates have been calculated using the Jackknife method of variance estimation. This involves the calculation of 30 'replicate' estimates based on 30 different sub-samples of the obtained sample. The variability of estimates obtained from these subsamples is used to estimate the sample variability surrounding the main estimate. RSEs for median estimates have been calculated using the Woodruff method.

The Excel spreadsheets in the Data downloads section contain all the tables produced for this release and the calculated RSEs for each of the estimates.

Only estimates (numbers or percentages) with RSEs less than 25% are considered sufficiently reliable for most analytical purposes. However, estimates with larger RSEs have been included. Estimates with an RSE in the range 25% to 50% should be used with caution while estimates with RSEs greater than 50% are considered too unreliable for general use. All cells in the Excel spreadsheets with RSEs greater than 25% contain a comment indicating the size of the RSE. These cells can be identified by a red indicator in the corner of the cell. The comment appears when the mouse pointer hovers over the cell.

Another measure is the Margin of Error (MOE), which shows the largest possible difference that could be between the estimate due to sampling error and what would have been produced had all persons been included in the survey with a given level of confidence. It is useful for understanding and comparing the accuracy of proportion estimates.

Where provided, MOEs for estimates are calculated at the 95% confidence level. At this level, there are 19 chances in 20 that the estimate will differ from the population value by less than the provided MOE. The 95% MOE is obtained by multiplying the SE by 1.96.

$$MOE = SE \times 1.96$$

Calculation of standard error

Standard errors can be calculated using the estimates (counts or percentages) and the corresponding RSEs. Since the RSE is obtained by expressing the standard error as a percentage of the estimate, recalculating the standard error is obtained by multiplying the estimate by the RSE.

Proportions and percentages

Proportions and percentages formed from the ratio of two estimates are also subject to sampling errors. The size of the error depends on the accuracy of both the numerator and the denominator. A formula to approximate the RSE of a proportion is given below. This formula is only valid when x is a subset of y

$$RSE(\frac{x}{y}) \approx \sqrt{[RSE(x)]^2 - [RSE(y)]^2}$$

Differences

The difference between two survey estimates (counts or percentages) can also be calculated from published estimates. Such an estimate is also subject to sampling error. The sampling error of the difference between two estimates depends on their SEs and the relationship (correlation) between them. An approximate SE of the difference between two estimates (x-y) may be calculated by the following formula

$$SE(x-y) \approx \sqrt{[SE(x)]^2 + [SE(y)]^2}$$

While this formula will only be exact for differences between separate and uncorrelated characteristics or sub populations, it provides a good approximation for the differences likely to be of interest in this publication.

Significance testing

A statistical significance test for a comparison between estimates can be performed to determine whether it is likely that there is a difference between the corresponding population characteristics. The SE of the difference between two corresponding estimates (x and y) can be calculated using the formula shown above in the Differences section. This SE is then used to calculate the following test statistic

$$\left(\frac{x-y}{SE(x-y)} \right)$$

If the value of this test statistic is greater than 1.96 then there is evidence, with a 95% level of confidence, of a statistically significant difference in the two populations with respect to that characteristic. Otherwise, it cannot be stated with confidence that there is a real difference between the populations with respect to that characteristic.

Rounding

As estimates have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

Standards and classifications

- Country of birth data are classified according to the Standard Australian Classification of Countries (SACC), 2011 (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/F63BD8670E4CF23CCA257FDC0011DB93?opendocument)
- Occupation data, including skill level of main job, are classified according to ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2013, Version 1.2 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1220.0)
- Industry data are classified according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 2006 (Revision 2.0) (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0)
- Education data are classified according to the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), 2001 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0)
- Geography data are classified according to the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), 2016 (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/9593E06A9325683BCA257FED001561EA?opendocument)

Glossary

Show all

Actively looking for work

People who were taking active steps to find work. Active steps comprise:

- wrote, phoned or applied in person to an employer for work
- answered an advertisement for a job on the Internet, in a newspaper or on noticeboards
- had an interview with an employer
- contacted friends or relatives
- took steps to purchase or start up own business
- advertised or tendered for work
- registered with a Workforce Australia provider
- registered with other employment agency.

Actual hours of work

Actual hours of work refers to a specified reference period (e.g. a week) and includes:

- hours actually worked during normal periods of work
- time spent in addition to hours worked during normal periods of work (including overtime)
- time spent at the place of work on activities such as the preparation of the workplace, repairs and maintenance, preparation and cleaning of tools, and the preparation of receipts, time sheets and reports
- time spent at the place of work waiting or standing by due to machinery or process breakdown, accident, lack of supplies, power or internet access, etc.
- time corresponding to short rest periods (resting time) including tea and coffee breaks or prayer breaks
- travel time connected to work (excluding commuting time), and
- training and skills enhancement related to the job or employer.

Excluded are:

- hours paid for but not worked, such as paid annual leave, public holidays or paid sick leave
- meal breaks (e.g. lunch breaks)
- paid and unpaid time 'on call'
- time spent on travel to and from work when no productive activity for the job is performed (e.g. commuting time), and
- time off during working hours to attend outside educational activities, even if it is authorised, e.g. those not connected to the job or employer.

For multiple job holders, PJSM includes separate measure of actual hours worked in main job and in all jobs.

Age of youngest child

Age of the youngest child, 15 years and under, in the household.

Available to start work

Refers to people who were available to start work or working more hours in the reference week, or in the next four weeks.

Available to start work within four weeks

People who were available to start work within four weeks or, for people with children aged 12 years and under, could start work within four weeks if suitable child care was available.

Change in work

Employees were considered to have had some change in work if they had been with their current employer for one year or more and reported that, in the last 12 months, they had:

- been promoted
- transferred to a different position
- changed usual weekly hours, or
- changed occupation.

Civilian population aged 15 years and over

All usual residents of Australia aged 15 years and over except members of the permanent defence forces, certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments customarily excluded from census and estimated population counts, overseas residents in Australia, and members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.

Contributing family workers

People who work without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative.

Cyclical underemployed workers

People who were employed and worked less than their usual hours during the reference week for economic reasons (i.e. due to being 'stood down', or there was insufficient or no work available). Unless otherwise stated, this includes both full-time and part-time workers.

Did not want to work

People who were not classified as employed or unemployed and answered 'no' when asked if they would like a job.

Discouraged job seekers

People with marginal attachment to the labour force who did not have a job to go or return to, who wanted to work and were available to start work within the next four weeks but whose main reason for not actively looking for work was that they believed they would not find a job for any of the following reasons:

- considered to be too young or too old by employers
- believes ill health or disability discourages employers
- lacked necessary schooling, training, skills or experience
- difficulties because of language or ethnic background
- no jobs in their locality or line of work
- no jobs in suitable hours; or
- no jobs at all.

Duration of current period of insufficient work

For full-time workers who worked fewer than 35 hours in the reference week due to economic reasons, refers to the number of weeks they have been working fewer than 35 hours a week.

For part-time workers who would prefer to work more hours, refers to the number of weeks they have wanted to work more hours.

Duration of job search

The period of time from when an unemployed person began looking for work until the end of the reference week; or the period of time since an unemployed person last worked in any job until the end of the reference week; whichever was the shorter period.

Duration since last job

The elapsed time since ceasing the last job.

Economic reasons

Economic reasons for full-time workers having worked fewer than 35 hours in the reference week are:

- there was no work or not enough work available, e.g. due to material shortages, or
- they were stood down.

Does not include

- Bad weather or plant breakdown
- On strike, locked out, or industrial dispute

Employed persons

All people aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week:

- worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind, in a job or business or on a farm (comprising employees, employers and own account workers), or
- worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (i.e. contributing family workers), or
- were employees who had a job but were not at work and were
  - away from work for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week
  - away from work for more than four weeks up to the end of the reference week and received pay for some or all of the four week period to the end of the reference week
  - away from work as a standard work or shift arrangement
  - on strike or locked out
  - on workers' compensation and expected to return to their job; or
- were owner managers who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.

Employees

An employed person who does not operate their own incorporated or unincorporated enterprise. An employee works for a public or private employer and receives remuneration in wages, salary, on a commission basis with a retainer, tips, piece-rates, or payment in kind.

Family

Two or more people, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering; and who are usually resident in the same household. The basis of a family is formed by identifying the presence of a couple relationship, lone parent-child relationship or other blood relationship. Some households will, therefore, contain more than one family unit.

Family reasons for not actively looking for work

Includes caring for ill or elderly person or family member, caring for children and other family considerations.

Full-time preference

People who preferred to work 35 hours or more a week.

Full-time or part-time status of hours worked in last job

Whether worked full-time or part-time in their last job based on the weekly hours they usually worked.

Full-time workers

Employed persons who usually worked 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and others who, although usually working fewer than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week.

Future starters

People waiting to start, within four weeks of the end of the reference week, a new job that they have already obtained (and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then). Under International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines, these people do not have to be actively looking for work to be classified as unemployed.

Had a job to go or return to

People who were waiting to start a job already obtained. Also includes people who had a job but, up to the end of the reference week, had been away from work without pay for four weeks or longer and had not been actively looking for work.

Had worked before

Refers to people who had worked before and were either out of work or had worked for a different employer before starting their current job.

Industry

An industry is a group of businesses or organisations that undertake similar economic activities to produce goods and/or services. In this publication, industry refers to ANZSIC Division as classified according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 2006 (Revision 2.0) (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0) (cat. no. 1292.0).

Intention to enter the labour force in the next 12 months

The intention of people to work or look for work in the 12 months following the interview.

Interstate

Refers to whether people were prepared to move to another state or territory if offered a suitable job.

Job

Any paid employment, full-time or part-time. Includes jobs where people worked for an employer and jobs where people were running their own businesses.

Job attachment

Job attachment extends beyond the definition of employment to include all people who have an attachment to a job. People with job attachment include:

- people who worked during the reference week (employed)
- people who had a job but were away from work during the reference week (regardless of how long they had been away from work)
- people waiting to start a new job or waiting to return to a job,
- people on workers compensation,
- people in a job who did not work during the reference week and usually work no hours.

Labour force

For any group, people who were employed or unemployed, as defined.

Left a job

People who are classified as voluntarily ceasing their last job.

Level of highest educational attainment

Level of highest educational attainment identifies the highest achievement a person has attained in any area of study. It is not a measurement of the relative importance of different fields of study but a ranking of qualifications and other educational attainments regardless of the particular area of study or the type of institution in which the study was undertaken. It is categorised according to the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), 2001 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0) (cat. no. 1272.0) Level of education classification.

Level of highest non-school qualification

A person's level of highest non-school qualification is the highest qualification a person has attained in any area of formal study other than school study. It is categorised according to the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), 2001 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0) (cat. no. 1272.0) Level of education classification.

Long-term underemployed

People whose duration of current period of insufficient work is 12 months or more.

Looking for work with more hours

Looked for work with more hours at some time in the last 12 months.

Lost a job

People who are classified as involuntarily ceasing their last job. Includes retrenchments, redundancies, dismissals, and losing a job due to ill health or injury.

Main activity when not in the labour force

The main activity of persons who are not in the labour force since they last worked or looked for work (or in the last 12 months if they haven't worked in the last year).

Main difficulty in finding work

The main difficulty in finding work during the current period of unemployment (or in the last 12 months if they haven't working in the last year).

Main job

The job in which most hours are usually worked.

Marginal attachment to the labour force

Persons who were not in the labour force in the reference week, wanted to work and:

- were actively looking for work but did not meet the availability criterion to be classified as unemployed; or
- were not actively looking for work but were available to start work within four weeks; or
- had a job to go or return to but were not available to start in the reference week.

The criteria for determining those in the labour force are based on activity (i.e. working or looking for work) and

availability to start work during the reference week. The criteria associated with marginal attachment to the labour force, in particular the concepts of wanting to work and reasons for not actively looking for work, are more subjective. Hence, the measurement against these criteria is affected by the respondent's own interpretation of the concepts used. An individual respondent's interpretation may be affected by their work aspirations, as well as family, economic and other commitments.

For more information see article Understanding the Australian Labour Force Using ABS Statistics in Labour Force, Australia (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0main+features999Dec%202013) (6202.0).

Non-economic reasons

Non-economic reasons for full-time workers having worked fewer than 35 hours in the reference week include:

- annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave
- own illness, injury or sick leave
- standard work arrangements or shift work
- personal reasons, studying, caring for sick or injured family members
- maternity, paternity or parental leave
- bad weather or plant breakdown
- on strike, locked out, or industrial dispute
- end of seasonal work.

Not available to start work

Refers to people who were not available to start work (or work with more hours) either in the reference week, or in the four weeks following the interview.

Not fully employed

People who are not fully employed comprise part-time workers who would prefer to work more hours, and full-time workers who worked part-time hours in the reference week for economic reasons.

Number of offers of employment

The number of separate offers of employment received during the current period of unemployment (or in the last 12 months if they haven't worked in the last year).

Occupation

An occupation is a collection of jobs that are sufficiently similar in their title and tasks, skill level and skill specialisation which are grouped together for the purposes of classification. In this publication, occupation refers to Major Group and Sub-Major Group as defined by ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2013, Version 1.2 (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/4AF138F6DB4FFD4BCA2571E200096BAD?opendocument) (cat. no. 1220.0).

Owner managers of incorporated enterprises (OMIEs)

People who work in their own incorporated enterprise, that is, a business entity which is registered as a separate legal entity to its members or owners (also known as a limited liability company). These people are sometimes classified as employees. They can work alone or in a business with employees.

Owner managers of unincorporated enterprises (OMUEs)

People who operate their own unincorporated enterprise, that is, a business entity in which the owner and the business are legally inseparable, so that the owner is liable for any business debts that are incurred. Includes those

engaged independently in a trade or profession. They can work alone or in a business with employees.

Part-time preference

People who preferred to work one to 34 hours a week.

Part-time workers

Employed persons who usually worked fewer than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work during the reference week.

Personal reasons for not actively looking for work[1]

People with personal reasons for not actively looking for work include:

- own short-term illness or injury
- own long-term health condition or disability
- attending an educational institution
- had no need or want to work
- working in an unpaid voluntary job
- problems with access to transport
- moved house or holidays.

People not in the labour force

Persons not in the labour force can be divided into those who are potential workers, and those who are not. People who are potential workers satisfy some, but not all, of the criteria required to be classified as unemployed.

Persons not in the labour force are considered to be potential workers if they:

- wanted to work and were actively looking for work (but, unlike unemployed persons, were not available to start work in the reference week), or
- wanted to work and were not actively looking for work but were available to start work within four weeks, or
- wanted to work but were not actively looking for work and were not available to start work within four weeks, or
- had a job to go or return to but were not available to start in the reference week.

Persons not in the labour force are not potential workers if they:

- did not want to work, or
- were permanently unable to work.

Potential workers

Potential workers includes:

- people not currently employed and who want to work, and
- people not classified as employed but have an attachment to a job.

Potential workers with job attachment

Potential workers with job attachment are people who are not classified as employed but have an attachment to a job. It includes:

- people waiting to start a new job or waiting to return to a job,
- people away from work without pay for four weeks or more,

- people on workers compensation who did not expect, or did not know, if they would return to their same employer, and
- people in a job who did not work during the reference week and usually work no hours.

Potential workers without job attachment

Potential workers includes all people who want to work and are not currently employed. It includes:

- people classified as unemployed,
- people not in the labour force who were classified as marginally attached, and
- people who wanted to work but were not actively looking and not available to start work within four weeks.

Preferred number of hours

The number of hours unemployed persons would like to work each week.

Preferred number of extra hours

The number of extra hours a week an underemployed worker would have preferred to work.

Preferred total number of hours

The total number of hours per week an underemployed worker would prefer to work.

Reasons for turning down job offers[1]

Classifies reasons for turning down job offers in current period of unemployment according to the following categories:

- Unsuitable job conditions
  - unsatisfactory pay or conditions
  - not in locality or line of work
  - hours unsuitable
  - unwilling to move state or city
  - too far to travel
- Personal reasons
  - own short-term illness or injury
  - own long-term health condition or disability
  - pregnancy
  - welfare or pension payments may be affected
  - returned to study
- Family reasons
  - child care
  - caring for an ill or elderly person or family member
- Other
  - waiting to start another job or starting a new business
  - other reasons
  - did not know.

Skill level of occupation

An occupation is a collection of jobs that are sufficiently similar in their title and tasks, skill level and skill

specialisation which are grouped together for the purposes of classification. In this publication, skill level of occupation refers to the skill levels defined for each occupation in the ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2013, Version 1.2 (cat. no. 1220.0). (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/4AF138F6DB4FFD4BCA2571E200096BAD?opendocument)

Status of employment

Classifies employed persons according to the following categories on the basis of their current job:

- Employees
  - with paid leave entitlements
  - without paid leave entitlements
- Owner managers with employees (employer)
  - Owner manager of incorporated enterprise with employees
  - Owner manager of unincorporated enterprise with employees
- Owner managers without employees (own account worker)
  - Owner manager of incorporated enterprise without employees
  - Owner manager of unincorporated enterprise without employees
- Contributing family workers.

Stood down

People who are in a situation where an employer is unable to provide useful work for its employees, for a particular period of time, for circumstances beyond its control.

Structural underemployed workers

People who were employed and who would prefer to work more hours than they usually work and were available to start work with more hours, either in the reference week or in the next four weeks. Unless otherwise stated, this includes both full-time and part-time workers.

Suitable job

A suitable job is:

- any job for which the person is qualified (if applicable), is capable of performing and which provides adequate job conditions (including pay, hours, travel to work, etc.)
- a job that would be accepted by the person irrespective of whether a move was required.

Underemployed workers (headline definition)

Underemployed workers are people who are employed and would prefer, and are available for, more hours of work than they currently have. They comprise:

- part-time workers who would prefer to work more hours than they usually work and were available to start work with more hours, either in the reference week or in the next four weeks; and
- full-time workers who worked part-time hours in the reference week for economic reasons (such as being stood down or insufficient work being available). It is assumed that these people would prefer to work full time in the reference week and would have been available to do so.

Underemployed workers (expanded definition)

Underemployed workers are people who are employed and would prefer, and are available for, more hours of work

than they currently have. They comprise:

- People who would prefer to work more hours than they usually work and were available to start work with more hours, either in the reference week or in the next four weeks (structural underemployed workers); and
- People who worked fewer hours in the reference week for economic reasons, such as being 'stood' down or insufficient work being available (cyclical underemployed workers).

It is possible for people to be in both types of underemployment - people who were stood down and also preferred more hours than usual.

Underutilisation rate

The sum of the number of people unemployed and the number of the people in underemployment, expressed as a proportion of the labour force.

Unemployed

People aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the reference week, and:

- had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week; or
- were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week, and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

Unemployment rate

For any group, the number of unemployed people expressed as a percentage of the labour force in the same group.

Usual hours of work

Usual hours of work refers to a typical period rather than the hours worked in a specified reference period. The concept of usual hours applies both to people at work and to people temporarily absent from work, and is defined as the hours worked during a typical week or day. Actual hours worked (for a specific reference period) may differ from usual hours worked due to illness, vacation, strike, overtime work, a change of job, or similar reasons.

Wanted to work

People not in the labour force who were not actively looking for work who answered 'yes' or 'maybe' when asked if they would like a job, as well as those people not in the labour force who were actively looking. It is assumed those people actively looking want a job.

With paid leave entitlements

The entitlement of employees to either paid holiday leave or paid sick leave (or both) in their current job. People employed in their own business or who were contributing family workers were not asked questions about paid leave entitlements.

Without paid leave entitlements

Employees who were not entitled to, or did not know whether they were entitled to, paid holiday leave and paid sick leave in their current job.

End note

1. Reasons provided by respondents in this item are not mutually exclusive categories.

History of changes

February 2025

Due to changes made to the LFS questionnaire in July 2024, the PJSM questionnaire for February 2025 has also been revised. Some questions related to wanting to work and whether available to work were previously asked in PJSM and are now sourced directly from LFS. Other changes include:

- Successful and unsuccessful job search activity has been expanded to include new steps to find work. Unsuccessful job search activity now focuses on the last four weeks, rather than the last 12 months.
- Difficulties looking for work has been expanded to include the entire last 12 months, rather than the current period of unemployment (less than 12 months).
- Duration of insufficient work is now collected from all underemployed workers. Published estimates remain on the original scope of part-time workers only for timeseries comparisons.
- Additional questions were added to explore different avenues for improving and expanding the scope of job mobility data, drawing on the methods used to measure quarterly retrenchment rates in LFS. Experimental estimates based on the expanded scope will be published in a future article. Currently published estimates remain on the original scope.
- Data related to the refusal of job offers is no longer collected.
- Table 7 in Potential Workers has been renamed from 'Number of job offers while looking for work' to 'Looking for work', as job offer data is no longer available.
- The Excel spreadsheets for potential workers and job mobility(Tables 1-3) have been redesigned to incorporate timeseries data back to 2015, with optional age or state and territory breakdowns.

Show all

February 2024

- The ABS has implemented some minor changes in how it accounts for some relatively small population groups within the sample. This has resulted in revisions back to February 2017.
- Population benchmarks were revised back to February 2017 to incorporate the latest ERP, based on final 2021 Census-based population estimates.

February 2023

- References to "jobactive Australia" were replaced with "Workforce Australia."
- Trend factor adjustment for estimation was re-instated after being suspended in 2020, with estimates revised back to February 2015.
- Population benchmarks were revised back to February 2017 to incorporate the latest ERP, based on preliminary rebasing of the population estimates to the 2021 Census.
- Additional information was included in Table 1 of Job mobility (pre-calculated job mobility rates) and Table 4 of Potential workers (specific childcare reasons for not looking for work).

February 2022

- New table formats, which included state and territory data in all tables. Tables were also renumbered under their respective topic pages.
- PJSM microdata released in DataLab for the first time, as a supplementary file for the Longitudinal Labour Force microdata.
- Release of PJSM data into TableBuilder delayed due to preparations for the release of Census 2021 data into TableBuilder.
- Underemployed workers topic page released one month later to incorporate underemployment data from the May 2022 Labour Force Survey.

February 2021

- Publication split into 3 releases: Underemployed workers, Potential workers and Job mobility
- Suspension of trend factor adjustments and a change to seasonally adjusted factors as a result of COVID-19
- Introduction of "Potential workers" as a broader presentation of unused labour supply. This expands upon and complements the alternative measure of people "marginally attached" to the labour force.
- Revisions to people who "had a job to go to" to include some people who had a job but were previously excluded because they were unavailable to start within 4 weeks.
- The Data downloads (Excel spreadsheets) were redesigned to adopt the timeseries format, which simplified and consolidated the suite of data downloads down to a single set of 22 spreadsheets. This format also facilitates automatic downloads and "data scraping" due to the use of unique IDs for each timeseries of data.
- Improvements were made to the PJSM TableBuilder to simplify the way the data items were presented, increase the usability and increase the range of data items. Data items are now grouped under 19 conceptual groups

February 2020

- Impacts from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were minimal in February 2020 as there was a relatively low number of confirmed cases in Australia at this point.
- The 2020 bushfires had a minimal impact on PJSM in February 2020, with most of the disruption to survey operations occurring earlier in January.

February 2019

- Tablebuilder released on the same day as the main publication, with data back to 2015 for the first time
- Trend factor adjustments applied to underemployment estimates for the first time
- Skill level of last job introduced to outputs
- Revisions to industry and occupation data back to 2015 based on improved coding of responses.
- Relationship in household data suspended due to an issue with family coding.
- Due to severe flooding in Townsville during February 2019, data for this region was imputed. The imputation drew upon previous information that had been collected from Townsville.
- Feature article: Understanding labour supply (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2019#understanding-labour-supply)
- From the archives: Underemployment, 1962 vs 2019 (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2019#from-the-archives-underemployment-1962-vs-2019) and 1985 vs 2019 (/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/feb-2019#from-the-archives-underemployment-1985-vs-2019) .

February 2018

- Regular rebenchmarking to historical estimates introduced to reflect most up-to-date population benchmarks
- Trend factor adjustments introduced to reduce seasonal and irregular effects on estimates.
- Introduction of people who "had a job to go to" into the marginal attachment framework, highlighting people who reported having a job but were not classified as employed (waiting to start a new job, or away from work for more than 4 weeks without pay).
- Extension of time series data in Tables 1, 2, 3, 12 and 17 (for this release only).
- Feature article: The impact of employment downturns and recovery cycles on labour force participation, 1981 to 2018 (https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/6226.0Feature%20Article1February%202018?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6226.0&issue=February%202018&num=&view=) .

February 2017

- Extended Labour Force Underutilisation rate first introduced. This was previously published in Australian Labour Market Statistics (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6105.0&viewtitle=Australian%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics~July%202014~Latest~08/07/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6105.0&issue=July%202014&num=&view=&) (cat. no. 6105.0)

February 2016

- First TableBuilder release

February 2015

- First issue

February 2014

- Bridging survey - Persons Not In the Labour Force (PNILF), Underemployed Workers (UEW) and Job Search Experience (JSE) (https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument) , (cat. No. 6226.0.55.001)
- These surveys were previously run in July (JSE) and September (PNILF and UEW). They were run for the first time in February before integrated into PJSM in 2015.